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PRACTICAL

Observations

ON

THE TREATMENT

OF

GLEETS,

AND

STRICTURES OF THE URETHRA.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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*IN submitting the following Observations on the treatment of a painful, and, in its consequences, a distressing, and in some cases, a dangerous complaint, to the Public; I am actuated by the desire of rendering a service to my profession, and the wish of substantiating my claim to the introduction of a new remedy to alleviate its symptoms, and expedite its cure.*

13, Hatton Garden,  
May, 1815.





**Practical Observations**  
**ON**  
**GLEETS**  
**AND**  
**STRICTURES OF THE URETHRA.**

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**M**Y first remark on the subject of gleans in men, is, that in by much the greatest number of cases which have come under my care, some disease in the urethra, usually stricture, has been an attendant symptom.

After trial of the various remedies recommended for the cure of this disease, such as tonics internally, and as injections, the cold bath, sea bathing,

&c. a permanent cure was seldom accomplished without the use of bougies. In many of these cases the patient had been frequently attacked with symptoms of gonorrhœa, and subjected to the treatment, for the inconveniences and expence of the cure of that disease, when no infection had taken place.

It is not my design to deny the use of a due attention to such medical aid as the health of the patient may require ; but to assert, that I have very rarely found medicine productive of any very material benefit in the cure of gleans.

A gleet, in the female sex, is usually termed *fluor albus* ; and in them may be considered as a disease differing from the gleet in men, the discharge coming from a different part, viz. the vagina.

Tonic medicines, with sea-bathing, a due attention to diet, and the avoiding long walks, or the erect posture for any such length of time as to fatigue, and adopting a recumbent position during part of the day, will be very conducive to a cure.

Among the various internal medicines used for this complaint, the long continued use of the gum olibanum, is one from which I have noticed most benefit to have been derived.

Among the various topical applications, the aqua aluminis composita of the London Dispensary, used as an injection, is one of the most efficacious.

I have met with one case of gleet in a woman, attended with obstruction of the urethra: which was cured by the



use of bougies introduced into the urethra.

In a former publication of cases and observations on fistula in ano, hæmorrhage, mortification, the venereal disease, and strictures of the urethra, I remarked on the subject of introducing caustic into the urethra, for the cure of strictures, the ill consequences which had occurred from that practice, within my observation ; lest the junior part of the profession might be induced to make an indiscriminate use of that remedy, from which, I then thought, and am now convinced, that serious evils would in some cases occur.

The great objection, which has ever struck me to the use of caustic, is the difficulty of applying it with certainty, so as to act only on the stricture, and not to injure the sound part of the urethra.

This objection is such as appears very difficult to overcome, since the urethra is in some cases, tortuous in the diseased part. An instance of this kind is amongst my anatomical preparations.

It occurred in a man who died in the London Hospital of a putrid fever, while under a course of bougies. Till examination after death, it was not known that the urethra was irregularly curved at the stricture, the bougies not having passed that part. This stricture is about half an inch in length, in which part the inner membrane of the urethra is forced into a longitudinal plica or wrinkle, and the spongy substance indurated.

In such strictures, which I suppose not to be uncommon, (since this was not attended with any unusual symptoms), a perseverance in the use of caustic, so as

pass the stricture, would be liable to burn through the membrane of the urethra, and to incur the danger of violent inflammation and its formidable consequences.\*

In such strictures as are caused by a membranous band or filament, or a portion of thin membranous substance,† (probably organised coagulable lymph), caustic is certainly more likely to effect a speedy cure than bougies. It should

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\* See Sharpe's Critical Enquiry, page 151.

† I have opened some urethras where caruncles were very evident: in one I found a filament near the verumontanum, running across the urethra, which had obstructed the entrance of the catheter. In another, I found small filaments, some loose, and one of three quarters of an inch long, attached at both ends to the urethra, but running in the direction of the canal. In a third, I found a small excrescence, not unlike a tricuspid valve of the heart.



seem then that it may be admitted as a prudent rule, not to apply the caustic so frequently, or so powerfully, as to be liable to destroy through the membrane of the urethra.\*

Another objection to the caustic application, and not a trivial one, is the danger of bringing on a violent inflammation of the urethra, scrotum, and contiguous parts, which is usually found to have a strong disposition to terminate in sphacelus and desquamation of the cellular membrane of the scrotum, penis, and perinæum. One case of this kind, arising from the caustic application to a stricture, I attended, and my patient's life

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\* Mr. Hunter's idea was, with the caustic (the lunar) to prepare the way for the bougie, and not to apply it above a minute.

was in no small degree of danger. I have also been informed of others, happening from the same cause.—I wish not to appear prejudiced against the use of the caustic, but to endeavour to render it a useful as well as a safe application. Mr. Hunter's idea of the caustic being applied only for a minute, appears very judicious; for the great danger attending the use of caustic is, that of its destroying through the membrane of the urethra, and then the urine getting diffused into the spongy substance of the urethra, the mischief will, I apprehend, be found usually to ensue.

That such effects are more subject to arise from the use of the caustic, than of bougies, will, I believe, hardly be doubted. Considering, therefore, the above circumstances, it appears to me, that a cure should be always attempted

by bougies, previous to the use of caustic.\*

In cases where a bougie would not pass the stricture, I have made use of the following expedient with success: on introducing two, and sometimes even three small bougies down to the stricture, by pressing forwards, first one, then another, I have succeeded in passing the stricture. The first idea of this method struck me in a case in which I had reason to suppose that the urethra was irregularly curved at the stricture. This

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\* It has been advised, even by practitioners of reputation, when obstructions of the urethra proceed from caruncles or carnosities, as they are termed, to destroy them by the use of the lunar caustic; but the risk of injuring the contiguous parts by applications of this nature, is evidently so great, as must for ever prevent the practice from being generally received.



case occurred in 1784, in a man who, two years before, fell from about five feet above, astride upon a block of wood, bruised his perinæum violently, and injured the urethra, so as to cause a considerable hemorrhage. His urine, when he applied to me for relief, came away almost constantly by drops.

Not being able to pass the smallest bougie through the stricture, I introduced two small bougies down to that part, imagining that as one must point in a wrong direction for passing through the stricture, the other might probably be in a right one. I urged first the one, and then the other, and was successful in passing the stricture.

One word more on the subject of bougies, which is, that cures by them are effectual and permanent. I speak from

experience of cases under my own management, several years ago.

From the time (1799), when these observations were printed I have availed myself of every opportunity of trying the effects of different applications to the urethra, by the means of bougies armed with such medicaments as I thought were likely to expedite the cure of strictures.

In many strictures, a spasmodic affection of the urethra is occasionally a concomitant effect: in others, it is nearly constant, when the disease is called a spasmodic stricture.

I wish to be rightly understood upon the subject of spasms of the urethra. Some strictures seem to be purely spasmodic; that is, that no local disease is to

be discovered, although the high probability is, that there is some local affection of the membrane of the urethra, although not such as to be ascertained by bougies, or any other remedies.

The difficulty of cure, in such cases, induced me to make trial of milder remedies than the caustic, from which I had seen, and heard of, such serious ill consequences.

Ung: hydrargyri, smeared on the bougies, I tried in several cases; but never could perceive any material advantage from its use.

Ung: hydrargyri nitratis, lowered with lard, was used also without benefit.

Ung: oxydi hydrargyri rubri, in some cases, I thought of service.



\* Turning my thoughts then to the effect of irritation from the disease, as well as from the use of bougies, I was induced to try the effect of opium, powdered, and made into an ointment with lard; but from its use I found scarcely any benefit.

I next tried the extract of belladonna, and was soon gratified with observing its effect in abating the irritability of the strictured part.†

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\* In some cases of permanent stricture much disappointment is experienced by such irritation being produced by the use of the mildest bougies, as to render a continuance of their use impracticable from a spasmodic affection of the strictured portion of the urethra supervening. In such cases the occasional use of belladonna, by abating such irritation, is likely to obviate such obstacle to the cure.

† Mr. Jourdan, Surgeon of the Imperial Guard, in conjunction with Mr. Alyon, has published in Paris, a translation of Professor Hecker's Work on Gonorrhœa.

He recommends sedative soluble bougies. Dissolve four grains of kali purum in distilled water two ounces, and add gum arabic sufficient to make it viscid. Dip the pieces of

The urethra, in its natural state, is closed through its whole extent, and forced open by the passage of the urine expelled from the bladder in discharging its contents; and the urethra, as well as every other muscular structure, is liable to be affected by spasm, which produces a degree of contraction beyond what the part readily admits, losing its power of

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cotton into the composition, and suspend them separately by pins, taking care that they retain their shape and proper form; then dip them again, and dry them, and repeat this process until they are of a convenient size.

And he adds extract of hyoscyamus, or of belladonna, either alone, or in conjunction with the oxymuriate of mercury, deserve attention; from which latter sentence, it may fairly be concluded, that the author had not made trial of the extract of belladonna.\*

*Medical and Physical Journal, No. 184, page 516.*

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\* The notice taken in this publication of belladonna has been an inducement to me to publish this small work sooner than I otherwise should have done, in order to establish my claim to the discovery of the use of belladonna in this disease.

relaxing till the spasm shall be removed by art, or subsides spontaneously. When this occurs, it constitutes the disease termed spasmodic stricture.

That the mind may have an effect upon the urethra, is proved by the circumstance of painful sensations being produced in persons of much sensibility, after a suspicious connection ; which will subside spontaneously, on the mind being freed from the apprehensions of having contracted a gonorrhœa, by the period of its appearance being elapsed, or the use of such remedies as are judged by the patient to have cured the disease.

The causes producing strictures are various, and, in most instances, not easy to be ascertained. The injury done to the urethra, by the passage of particles of gravel, may be clearly admitted as one,



and not an unfrequent cause. I have had cases of stricture in boys several years under the age of puberty, and met with some in children who underwent the operation of lithotomy, at the London Hospital, during my attendance there as apprentice to the late Mr. Grindall. From this circumstance I was induced to imagine, that the passage of urine, surcharged with lithic acid (which may be ascertained by using litmus as a test of acid), might, by stimulating the inner membrane of the urethra, produce spasmodic stricture, and induce it occasionally in the permanent stricture.\*

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\* In confirmation of this remark, I have to add the circumstance of the effect of stale, or old beer, or wine of an acidulous quality, such as claret, as well as of punch from the acid of lemons, having brought on a suppression of urine.

In some cases, in patients whose urine was often surcharged with lithic acid, I have prescribed alkaline medicines with advantage. The medicine was the subcarbonate of potass with magnesia.

The spasmodic stricture having continued an undeterminate period of time, the portion of the urethra so affected, in some cases becomes contracted, and thus constitutes the disease called permanent stricture.

In Sir Everard Home's Treatise on Strictures of the Urethra, he remarks,—  
 “ That the permanent stricture is no-  
 “ thing more than the spasmodic stric-  
 “ ture, described in the last section, in  
 “ a more advanced stage, where the  
 “ contraction has so established itself,  
 “ that at all times the seat of the stric-

“ ture is narrower than the rest of the  
 “ canal. It still, however, possesses the  
 “ power of contracting and relaxing; in  
 “ the contracted state, entirely closing  
 “ up the passage; in the relaxed state,  
 “ allowing the urine to pass through it  
 “ in a small stream.

“ In this state of things, the spasmotic  
 “ contraction, upon any irritation  
 “ being applied to the part, is very  
 “ great, and acts with considerable force.  
 “ This is known by passing a small bou-  
 “ gie, through the stricture, which in its  
 “ relaxed state offered no resistance; but  
 “ after a few minutes, not unfrequently  
 “ contracts upon the bougie, and grasps  
 “ it, making so much resistance, that  
 “ when it is attempted to be withdrawn,  
 “ some force is required to overcome  
 “ it. The bougie, when examined, has  
 “ an indented mark upon its surface, ex-



“ actly resembling the impression of a  
 “ piece of thin packthread tied round  
 “ it.

“ When a stricture in this stage is exa-  
 “ mined in the dead body, it has the ap-  
 “ pearance of a membranous septum  
 “ crossing the canal, with an orifice in  
 “ the centre ; the membrane itself being  
 “ not thicker, at the edge of the orifice,  
 “ than common writing paper. It some-  
 “ times happens that the contraction is  
 “ not equally all round, but more on  
 “ one side than the other, and the orifice  
 “ not exactly in the middle; in other re-  
 “ spects the appearance is the same.

“ A stricture in this state impedes the  
 “ passage of the urine, in a degree, every  
 “ time an attempt is made to evacuate  
 “ it ; and the force with which the urine  
 “ is impelled against the stricture by

“ the action of the bladder, is also in-  
 “ creased according to the resistance ;  
 “ producing irritation in the stricture,  
 “ and giving it a stronger disposition  
 “ to contract ; so that in this way the  
 “ canal is in time rendered entirely im-  
 “ pervious at that part.”

The appearance here mentioned of a  
 membranous septum, or band, at the  
 stricture, is certainly not the constant  
 disease ; but a diminution of the size of  
 the canal, without any filamentous bands,  
 and accompanied with a rigidity of the  
 substance of the urethra at the part, is a  
 more frequent appearance. Of the truth  
 of this, I have proofs among my prepa-  
 rations, and such are in Mr. Brookes’s  
 splendid Museum in Blenheim Street.

In this latter kind of stricture, the  
 use of caustic cannot be supposed capa-

ble of curing the disease by only a few applications ; whereas, when often repeated, it would be liable to make a passage through the internal membrane of the urethra, producing at the time much inflammation, often serious mischief; and in future, difficulty in the cure, by the liability of the bougie to enter into such false passage.

These few remarks upon the general subject of strictures, seemed necessary to be premised previous to the recommendation of a remedy to abate the irritability of the urethra, in cases of stricture of the urethra.

In conclusion, I have to add, that the use of Belladonna has been of much assistance in several cases, by its application when spasm or increased contraction at the stricture occurred during the



use of bougies. The theory of its action may be illustrated by its effect on the pupil of the eye, which it causes to dilate, and which effect continues many hours after its application.

I have used it in two ways; the first is by smearing the bougie at its point, about half an inch up, with the extract of belladonna, immediately previous to its being used. A common bougie is to be first introduced to distend the part, and then the bougie, armed with belladonna, to be passed into the stricture, and kept in as long as the patient can conveniently bear it. A better stream of urine has ensued during that and the ensuing day or two, and the common bougie has passed with more facility afterwards. I do not recommend its daily use, but only at such times as the stricture by obstacle to, or contraction round

the bougie, shews that a spasmodic affection has taken place.

By pursuing this method, I am convinced that a cure has been, in several cases, expedited, and rendered less painful.

The other method of using belladonna is to have some of the dried leaves finely powdered, worked into the bougies at the point, and about half an inch upwards.

In one case of spasmodic stricture, in a man of very debilitated constitution, whose urine I drew off night and morning for several days, finding great and increasing difficulty in passing the catheter through the stricture, I injected a solution of belladonna in water up the urethra, which, by abating the spasm,

enabled me to introduce the catheter into the bladder, with more facility to myself, and less pain to the patient.\*

In another case of an elderly man, of very emaciated constitution, aged sixty-seven years, who had been using bougies almost daily for some months; by the occasional introduction of a bougie, armed as above, he was enabled to void his urine with so much less difficulty, that he has not now occasion to use a bougie above once in a fortnight, or three weeks; whereas, during two months previous to that time, he could seldom pass his urine without previously introducing a common bougie, or, at least, passing one once daily.

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\* Sir E. Home in his Treatise on Strictures, states, the caustic as the only remedy for such spasmodic affections.



I am, at this time, attending a lady, who had a suppression of urine, for which I introduced a catheter five times. Finding much difficulty in the introduction of the instrument, from what seemed to be a spasmodic contraction of the urethra and neck of the bladder, I introduced one previously smeared with extract of belladonna, and left it in the urethra twelve hours, when it was withdrawn. The urine came away slowly afterwards, and the patient was relieved from the very unpleasant circumstance of having the instrument again introduced.

More cases might have been added in proof of the utility of the practice above recommended; but I refrain from so doing, as not perceiving that such would at present materially tend to elucidate the subject.













